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**Comparative analysis of the discourse on Brexit in the  
context of Estonian and Russian language media**

Bachelor thesis

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## **Abstract**

Estonian public is exposed to two different narratives in media. This paper discusses the reasons why the United Kingdom decided to leave the European Union and reactions of media outlets in Estonia and Russia to that decision. The aim of this thesis is to find out whether Estonian Russian-language media are reflecting more narrative of Russian Federation or Estonian narrative of the discourse on Brexit and also find out how different media spheres influence the way Brexit is presented in media. The research examines different articles which cover topic of Brexit in nine media outlets from Estonia and Russia in the period of six months. The articles are compared by its content and attitude toward Brexit. The results of this research show to which degree and how Russian-language media in Estonia is affected.

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## **List of abbreviations**

**Brexit** – formed from two words “Britain” and “exit”, meaning “British exit from the European Union.

**EEC** – European Economic Community

**EU** – European Union

**ERR** – Eesti Rahvusringhääling (Estonian Public Broadcasting)

**IMF** – International Monetary Fund

**INA** – International News Agency

**NATO** – North Atlantic Treaty Organization

**NG** – Novaya Gazeta

**RT** – Russia Today

**Ria** – Ria Novosti

**UK** – United Kingdom

**US/USA** – United States of America

# 1. Introduction

On 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2016 people of the United Kingdom have voted in favor of leaving the European Union. This was a historical moment for the whole European community. People are polarized and share opposite opinions about influence of Brexit – one says it can have a destructive influence on European Union and it will cause problems in world's economy, others say it is positive sign to a better World and economic growth. However, this paper does not discuss the influence of Brexit but examines different discourses on Brexit that can be found in popular media outlets. Media has a significant impact on all levels of the economic and political decision process, local, regional, national and supranational. People's thoughts about certain issues are highly influenced by the narrative of media channels that they are exposed to. Different narratives might be influenced by the official position of the country where the media source is located. Most of the popular media sources are state-owned and they are dictating the narrative that should be broadcasted and introduced to people. This paper is concentrated on Estonian and Russian media spheres. According to "The Reporters Without Borders" in 2016 Estonia was ranked 14<sup>th</sup> country in the World in World Press Freedom while Russia was ranked 148<sup>th</sup>. Those are the two examples of free and unfree media. However, this is not the only reason for such a choice of media spheres. Over 20% of Estonian population are native Russian speakers and most of them live in Russian language media space. Russian Federation media uses different narrative than Estonian media. This paper analyzes who influences Russian language media in Estonian Republic more – Russian Federation media or Estonian media. For that it is important to analyze all three media sources – Estonian language, Estonian Russian language and Russian Federation media.

This topic is important because today in Europe we have two different narratives – Western and Russian. Estonian public is exposed and might be influenced by both sides and this can go along ethnic lines. Analysis is based on the discourse on Brexit because this event is very recent, important for The European Union, as well as for Estonian Republic and discourses on Brexit have different narrative on two sides of the border. This research topic is also quite relevant because it appears still underexplored. There are articles that dissert on the topic of Russian media influence on Russian speakers in Estonia, for example Jill Dougherty and Riina Kaljurand's analysis made in 2015 called

“Estonia’s “Virtual Russian World”: The Influence of Russian Media on Estonia’s Russian Speakers” and Valeria Jakobsons academic dissertation written in 2002 „Role of the Estonian Russian-language Media in the Integration of the Russian speaking minority into Estonian society“. However, it is unexplored to which narrative Russian language media in Estonia is closer when talking about Brexit and further existence of the EU. The aim of this thesis is to find out whether Estonian Russian language media are reflecting more narrative of Russian Federation or Estonian narrative of the discourse on Brexit and also find out how different media spheres influence the way Brexit is presented in media. In order to do that we need to process and analyze many different articles in Russian, Estonian and Estonian Russian media field that talk about Brexit. The results of this work will not only be applicable for the discourse on Brexit but also other topics covered in the news.

In order to achieve this goal author has the following tasks:

- 1) Analyze different media articles about Brexit
- 2) Identify different narratives in Estonian media
- 3) Find out if there is a change in narrative after referendum
- 4) Find out degree of within-group differences and cross-group similarities
- 5) Understand history and reasons of Brexit

The paper begins with the description of reasons that led Great Britain to make the historical decision and the history behind it. In order to talk about discourse on Brexit in different media spheres it is important to understand why Brexit happened and what it should mean for Europe and the World. The narrative of the media channel can vary according to the view on the reasons that led to Brexit, for instance one source can be more tolerant and supportive to refugees and other can be blaming them for the problems of the EU. Depending on its positions, discourse can be different.

After that in third part comes the theoretical frame and description of method author uses to analyze media sources.

The fourth part is dedicated to the empirical analysis of articles. Articles from nine different sources are analyzed by the author. On the basis of analysis author provides Figures which shows differences in narrative and ways of expression. Narrative analysis

will show the reader how Russian media differs from Estonian one and to which narrative Estonian-Russian media is closer.



## **2. Making sense of Brexit – framing euroscepticism**

The history of Britain's membership in the European Community is long and ambiguous. During the last 50 years United Kingdom was a part of a big European project which started in 1957 with the Treaty of Paris when France, Western Germany, Belgium, the Netherlands, Italy and Luxembourg established the European Economic Community (EEC), the predecessor of today's European Union. (Pruitt, 2017) The United Kingdom joined the European Economic Community only in 1973, ten years after they made an application, because French leader Charles de Gaulle vetoed British it as he was afraid that English would replace French as an official language of the community. However their membership started demonstrating signs of doubts and already in 1975 United Kingdom held a referendum in on the question: "Do you think the UK should stay in the European Community (Common Market)?" Sixty-seven percent voted in favour of European Community membership and the "yes" votes included most of the UK's 68 administrative counties, regions and Northern Ireland, while only Shetland and Western Isles voted against.

In 1980s' when Margaret Thatcher was the prime minister of the UK she "thought that Europe was much more than the European Union and complained about the identification of both." (Troitiño, 132, 2009) She has also fought for benefits that UK should have got from Brussels. For example in 1984 she reached the agreement that UK would pay less money to the common European budget because British farmers are not getting the same support as their European colleagues so British taxpayers should not contribute as much as mainland Europeans. When Jacques Delors became the President of the European Commission in 1985 he took the course towards deeper European integration and common currency, which was completely unacceptable for Thatcher. (Литвинова, 2015)

In 1988 Margaret was invited to the College of Europe in Bruges where she gave her famous speech which is still quoted by British nationalists and euro sceptics. In that speech she stated: "Mr. Chairman, you have invited me to speak on the subject of Britain and Europe. Perhaps I should congratulate you on your courage. If you believe some of the things said and written about my views on Europe, it must seem rather like inviting Genghis Khan to speak on the virtues of peaceful coexistence!" (Thatcher,

1988) She had an idea different from some European colleagues. Namely she thought of Europe as a union of sovereign states without common ruling mechanism called European Institutions. Also Margaret Thatcher was against domination of any country over others but as it turned out at that point, France was influencing over community since its foundation. (Troitiño, 2009: 136)

Euroscepticism is wide-spread in British society since they have joined the EU. According to Paul Taggart and Aleks Szczerbiak there are two types of euroscepticism – hard and soft. Hard euroscepticism is “where there is a principled opposition to the EU and European integration and therefore can be seen in parties who think that their countries should withdraw from membership, or whose policies towards the EU are tantamount to being opposed to the whole project of European integration as it is currently conceived.” (Taggart, Szczerbiak, 2002: 7) Soft euroscepticism is “where there is NOT a principled objection to European integration or EU membership but where concerns on one (or a number) of policy areas lead to the expression of qualified opposition to the EU, or where there is a sense that ‘national interest’ is currently at odds with the EU’s trajectory.” (ibid) Taggart and Szczerbiak put United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) which was the biggest supporter of the “Leave” program before referendum into the group of hard eurosceptics. (Taggart, Szczerbiak, 2002: 11) Author will try to highlight features of soft and hard euroscepticism in the empirical analysis.

In 2016 there were many reasons why British people voted in favour of leaving the European Union. The journal „Forbes“ named three main reasons in their opinion why United Kingdom decided to leave the EU. One of the first reasons is economical. In 2008 a huge and the hardest economic crisis hit Europe and mostly its southern members – Greece, Spain and Portugal. During this time we witnessed a huge gap between the richest and the poorest states in the Union. For example the unemployment rate in southern states reaches 20% and higher, at the same time in Germany it is only 4,2%. The European Union seems to be very divided and not equal in economic sense. British people could not believe that weak European Union can solve the economic problems of the United Kingdom if they can’t even solve the problems of smaller and poorer states.

Second reason named in Forbes magazine was the „lack of sovereignty“. More specifically European countries after World War II have created and joined many different organizations such as EEC, IMF, NATO etc. George Friedman says in Forbes: „Many who oppose the EU believe these institutions no longer serve a purpose. Not only that, these organizations take control away from individual nations. Mistrust and fear of losing control made Brexit a reasonable solution to them.” (Friedman, 2016) The rise of nationalist movements in Europe has also triggered the Brexit. However, the main problem for British people was the ongoing refugee crisis in Europe which is not finishing and Europe is unable to solve it. Refugees were seen in the UK as a national issue and a threat to the country and its internal life.

George Friedman names the political elitism, which was seen as a threat to the national interests of the country, as the third reason of Brexit. Two oldest British political parties – Labour and Conservative parties were rejected on the referendum as they supported “Remain” side. Voters from the “Leave” side: “...saw both of the establishment parties as hostile to their interests.” (*ibid*) People who voted for Donald Trump in the United States voted following the logic that they are saying “no” to elites and “no” to establishment. According to George Friedman it is important to understand that people in the United Kingdom (more specifically Wales and England) voted against British elites. People thought that old politicians, businessmen and intellectuals lost their right to control the system. (*ibid*)

One of the main reasons in favour of Brexit that was actively used by the „leave“ side was the immigration problem. Refugees are just one source of immigrants in Western European countries and the United States but there are also many economic immigrants who wish to move and live in France, United Kingdom, the Netherlands and the United States of America.

In conclusion to this part it is important to state that there are numerous different factors that led to “Leave” vote on the referendum of 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2016, amongst them 1) Economical problems 2) Lack of Sovereignty 3) Political elitism 4) mass immigration but also 5) UK’s historical background. Brexit did not happen in one night but many years of European integration led to that historical decision for British people and the European Union.

### 3. Methodology and sources of information

The following part is dedicated to description of methods used in this research. Media outlets which are researched were divided into three groups. First group is Estonian media. Second group is Russian media. The most important group for this paper is the last group – Estonian media offered in Russian language. Third group is the reason for this research as the aim is to find out whether Estonian Russian language media are reflecting more narrative of Russian Federation or Estonian narrative of the discourse on Brexit.

From each researched group three media sources will be chosen for analysis which makes in total nine media sources. Important notice is that Estonian media will be presented by two sources which have Russian and Estonian editions and they will be counted separately. The reason for that is that Russian and Estonian editions of those papers don't always publish the same articles, so the contents vary depending on the language. Estonian edition has more articles than Russian edition. In addition to that there are many articles which are posted in Russian edition and not posted in Estonian edition and this fact made author feel that editors choose the audience. The most interesting part in this phenomenon is that articles published in Russian edition but not published in Estonian have more critical approach to Estonian politics, society, etc.

<b>Estonian</b>	<b>Estonian-Russian</b>	<b>Russian</b>
Postimees	Rus.Postimees	Ria Novosti
ERR	Rus. ERR	Russia Today
Pealinn	Baltnews	Novaja Gazeta

There are newspapers which are known for having Russian or Western position. Those will be examined too because they play their role in providing information to Estonian public. For example news agencies like Sputnik and Baltnews are not mainstream but alternative sources of information and they do not reflect the official position of the Estonian government but they must be presented in this work because they play their own role and they are edited by Estonian journalists. For Estonian media,

newspaper “Pealinn” (“Capital”) is used as a non-mainstream source of information. There is one main reason for that. Since 2006 trademark „Pealinn“ belongs to the Center party (Keskerakond) which used to be in opposition for over 10 years. (Sarv, 2012)

Russian media in this thesis is presented mainly by two news agencies which are sponsored by the Russian government, those are Ria Novosti and Russian language edition of Russia Today which is also an international TV channel broadcasted worldwide. The reason for taking these two sources is the statistics which says that Ria Novosti is the most popular news agency in Russia as well as Russia Today, although news at Yandex.ru may have more visitors we can't say that Yandex is a news agency but more a news searching tool. (Ria Novosti, 2015)

The third source is Novaja Gazeta (Новая Газета) is used in this thesis as a non-mainstream source of information in Russia which is more liberal than Ria and RT. Novaja Gazeta is known for being critical towards Russian politics and social affairs. The newspaper is funded by papers' staff (51%), Mikhail Gorbachev and Alexander Lebedev (49%) (Wikipedia)

Number of media sources in Russia is many times bigger than in Estonia. If we take state supported media in Russia and Estonia we can see many differences. It is logical that in Russia there are more journalists, bigger headquarters and more efficient system of news reporting. This can be very well seen when we start searching for articles on different topics in internet editions of media sources. For instance only during 24<sup>th</sup> of June 2016, the day after the UK referendum on Brexit in Ria Novosti 432 articles were released containing keyword “*brexit*” and only 61 article released in Estonian edition of Postimees with the same keyword. Russia Today released 127 articles with the same keyword and also 38 articles with cyrillic writing “*брексит*” which makes in total 165 articles during one day. On the website of Estonian state media – ERR, search engine showed only 18 “*brexit*”- related articles published on the 24<sup>th</sup> of June. This shows us that there is much more information going around Russian media and they are able to post it all. In order to reduce the number of related articles in Ria Novosti author is using the website's possibility to see how many views each article got, so it would be possible to identify and analyze the most relevant and popular ones. Media outlets often publish articles which are taken from the other sources. That is the

reason why information in different sources can be the same. Author chooses articles which are completely edited. Estonian media sources have relatively few articles so they will not be filtered. In general only articles published between 23<sup>rd</sup> March and 23<sup>rd</sup> September 2016 will be taken into account for the analysis. This makes a period of half a year and it covers three months before and three months after the historical referendum in the UK which took place on 23<sup>rd</sup> of June. As the day after referendum results were published and world community was shocked by the decision of British people and this news certainly was actively covered by world media, author brings out articles published on 24<sup>th</sup> of June separately for discussion.

To understand the situation with media sources in Estonia it is important to know the preferences of Estonian residents. In 2015 Ministry of Culture made a research which was called “Estonian integration monitoring” and they found out that 82% of Russian speakers in Estonia found themselves informed about events happening in Estonia. Among Russian speakers majority (74%) preferred to watch first Russian TV channel adopted for Baltic countries (ПБК – Первый Балтийский Канал) and other Russian TV channels. Second place takes Russian edition of Estonian TV News (Aktuaalne Kaamera) with 61%. Local Russian language newspapers read 52% of Russian speakers and this is the group studied in this research. (Eesti Integratsiooni Monitoring, 2015).

Interesting fact is that another research that studied trust of Estonian citizens in ERR in 2015 found out that 83% of Estonians trust it but amongst Russian speakers this number is only 46%. This can be the reason why Russian minority prefers First Russian Channel to ERR. (Turu-uuringute AS, 2015) The gap between Estonians and Russians in Estonia is very big. If we take into account newspapers in Estonian then 74% of Estonians say they are important for them and only 22% of Russian speakers say the same. In this case it would be logical if Russian speakers said that those Estonian newspapers in Russian language are important for them but in reality they are not, as it was previously said only 52% of Russian speakers find these newspapers important. There is also a big difference in trust in media. According to the research, amongst Estonians trust in TOP channels reaches 70-80 percent but amongst Russian speakers trust in Russian channels reaches only 50%. The growth of popularity of Estonian media amongst Russian speakers does not yet mean that they began to trust it more. Mostly all people who

follow local Estonian, Russian and Russian Federation media tend to be critical to all sources. (Eesti integratsiooni monitoring, 2015) This research paper does not analyze TV channels but the trend in written media is the same with TV.

There are several problems that may appear in empirical part. First of all is the choice of articles to analyze. As there are many articles in each of nine media sources it is very hard to analyze all. Author chooses approximately 20 articles per each source so it would make up to 180 articles that will be analyzed. Second problem may be a difficulty to identify narratives and compare Russian media to Estonian. In order to make a broader picture, author chooses side topics which are covered in researched articles and calculates how many articles write about side topics in their news about Brexit. In addition author identifies from the texts what approach articles have towards Brexit – positive, negative or neutral. This helps to compare media sources.

## **4. Empirical analysis**

In the beginning of this part all the researched media outlets are presented and described separately. The background of media outlets is important to understand the reasons why they may or may not take a certain stand in the question of Brexit.

### **4.1 Russian media**

#### **4.1.1 Ria Novosti**

The biggest source of information used in this paper is Russian news information agency (INA) Ria Novosti which belongs to the international news agency “Россия Сегодня” (Russia Today). It is important to keep in mind that TV channel and news agency Russia Today (RT) is not the same. Ria Novosti is the most popular online source of information in Russia. To the INA “Россия Сегодня” (Russia Today) belong such news portals like “Sputnik”, inosmi.ru, Ria Novosti and others. They are funded by the Russian government along with other Russian news agencies. The director of the news agency is Dmitri Kiselev (Россия Сегодня) who is one of many Russians included into sanction list of Western states. (Кравченко, Смирнов, 2014)

#### **4.1.2 Russia Today**

Russia Today is the second state-owned media source in Russia which is broadcasted in over 100 countries in Russian, English, Spanish and Arabic. (Russia Today) It is famous abroad for its pro-Russian narrative and it has been criticized for that. A hallmark of RT is that they write very short articles which are sometimes not informative at all. Very often they post articles which contain only one quote of any politician and in total articles can be not longer than four lines. Despite the fact that RT is treated as a propaganda channel, author did not see obvious signs of that in the context of Brexit. However it is possible to notice in comparison with Estonian media articles, more specifically the side topics that are covered.



According to the official website of Russia Today it is one of the most popular international TV channels in the World with over 70 million spectators per week in 38 countries. Russia Today is the first news agency which has reached over one billion views on Youtube and for now it has over 1, 82 billion views (in comparison CNN has 1,47 billion views) In August 2016 over 128 million people visited website rt.com (in comparison Euronews has 13,3 million visits). (ibid)

#### **4.1.3 Новая Газета (Novaya Gazeta)**

Novaya Gazeta in Russian means „New Journal“, is the: “(...)Russia’s leading investigative newspaper (...)” (Halpin, 2009). It is famous for its critical approach to the Russian politics and government that’s why it was chosen for the analysis in this paper. The journalist working for Novaya Gazeta has often become targets for assassins. Novaya Gazeta is not funded and supported by the Russian government and is known as an opposition edition. Newspaper “Izvestiya” found out that Novaya Gazeta in 2012 was sponsored by the government of the Netherlands. (Григорян, Бородина, Подрез: 2015)

## **4.2 Estonian media**

### **4.2.1 Postimees**

Postimees is the oldest newspapers in Estonia which was created in 1857 with the first edition of Perno Postimees. Since that time it became the most popular newspaper in Estonia. From the research made by Turu-Uuringute AS comes out that in 2013 around 20% of Estonian population was reading Postimees. (Postimees, 2013) However, before and sometimes still today Postimees is being accused of supporting Reform party which was ruling the country for the last 14 years. In 2005 opposition parties wrote an open letter to Schibsted Grupp who was the owner of Postimees and asked them if and why they support Reform party through Postimees. (Eesti Päevaleht, 2005) Since 2013 Eesti Meedia and Margus Linnamäe buy all the shares from Schibsted Group. In 2015 Eesti Meedia sold its part of shares to Margus Linnamäe and his media

company UP Invest. (Eesti Meedia) Postimees has three editions – one in Russian language, second in Estonian language and also English editio. In Russian edition about half of the articles are translated from Estonian, and half are either original or taken from other news agencies. This is the reason why content in Estonian and Russian parts varies.

#### **4.2.2 Eesti Rahvusringhääling (ERR)**

ERR is an Estonian state broadcasting company almost fully financed by the Estonian government. All the working conditions, broadcasting materials, goals etc. are imposed by the law – Eesti Rahvusringhäälingu Seadus. According to law ERR is an independent broadcasting agency and they are free to broadcast any information; the only condition is that it has to originate from Estonian law. The company belongs to the state. According to law ERR cannot impart any advertisements. (ERR seadus, 2007) ERR has Russian language TV channels and Russian version of their website where the majority of news are translated from Estonian. However, the number of articles in Russian part is smaller than in the Estonian.

#### **4.2.3 Pealinn**

Newspaper “Pevalinn” is also known as “Stolitsa”. This is a local newspaper which is shared for free in the capital of Estonia – Tallinn. Pealinn is sponsored by the municipality of Tallinn from city budget. As it was mentioned previously, Pealinn belongs since 2006 to the Center party which used to be in opposition for over 10 years. (Sarv, 2012) Pealinn has been criticized for its narrative which is treated by some people as pro-Russian. Some Estonian politicians, for example Tallinn city council member from the IRL party Tarmo Kruusimäe said that „Pevalinn“ supports Russian propaganda without hiding it. (Kruusimäe, 2014) For such criticism this newspaper is used as a non-mainstream from state funded source of information.

#### **4.2.4 Baltnews**

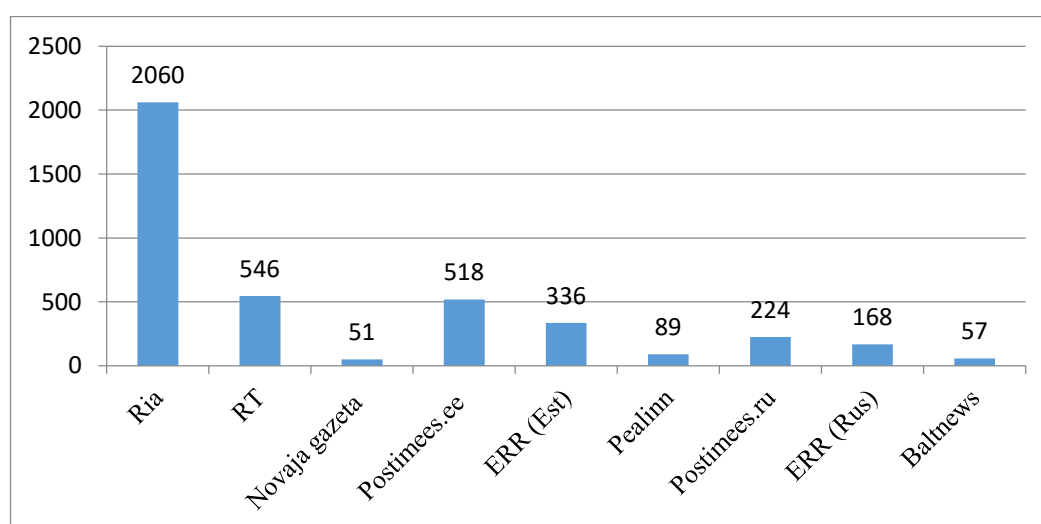
Baltnews positions itself as an experimental edition which tends to create positive and responsible vision of life in their readers (Корнилов, 2014) However, already from the description page it is understood that writing style in Baltnews is very poor and

reminds more of posts in social network. Baltnews has editions in all three Baltic countries. In Estonia, the director of the portal is Aleksandr Kornilov who was named by Estonian Defence Police (KAPO) a “Kremlin agent” and he was arrested in 2016 and released after. (ERR, 2016) On the website of Baltnews it is written that they provide information very objectively and independently. When anybody reads Baltnews article, he understands that they are not written professionally and sometimes push their own views on certain cases and do not provide information objectively. This is not a positive tone for an independent journal.

### 4.3 Articles analysis

Analysis of articles began with researching how many articles each analyzed media channel has to offer in the period of six months – three months before and three months after referendum. Total number of researched articles is 164 – approximately 20 articles per source.

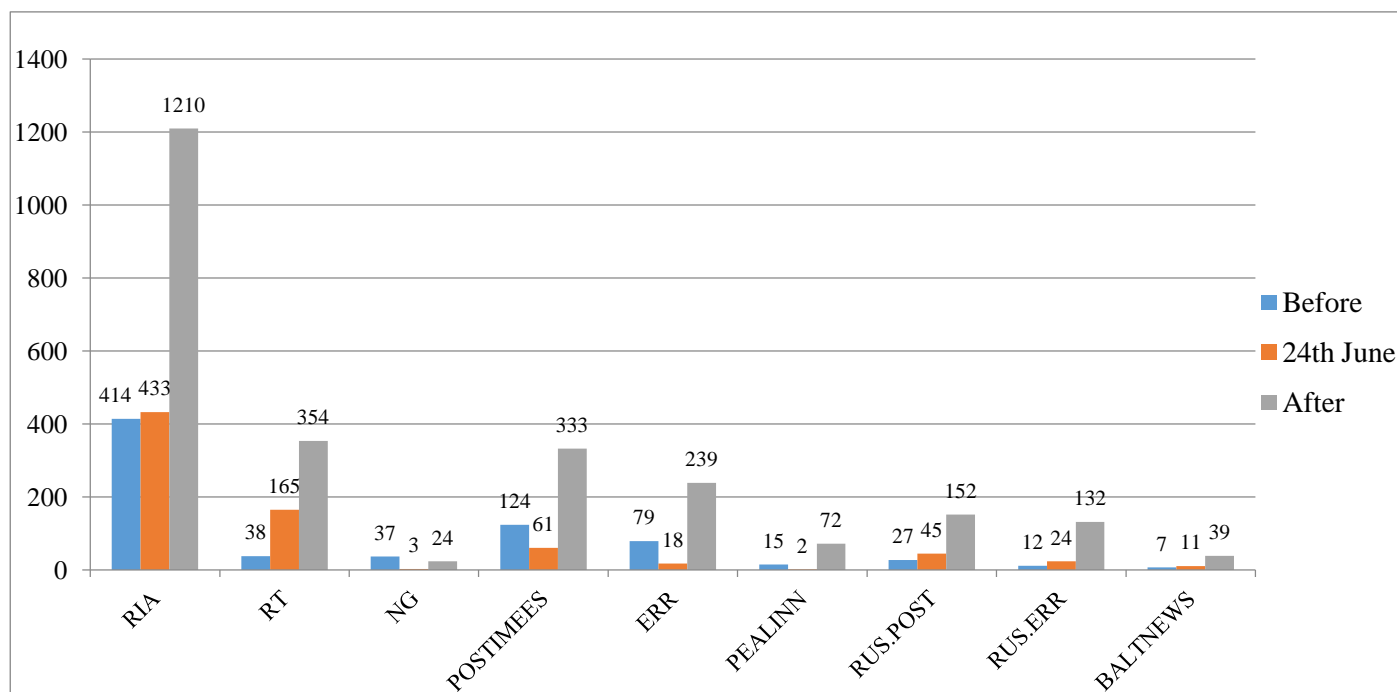
Brexit is definitely an important topic for all the world media. However, some media sources cover it much more specifically. This can be seen by the posted number of articles which at least obliquely covered this topic. Figure 1 shows the total number of articles that contain word „brexit“ or „брексит“.



**Figure 1.** Total number of articles with keyword “Brexit” in the period 23.03-23.09.2016 Source: Author’s research

The first thing that one can notice in this Figure is that Russian state media is the most active articles publisher. There can be several explanations for that. First of all

they are supported by the government funds so they have better possibilities to work more operatively, which includes bigger amount of staff, better working conditions, etc. Ria Novosti is the biggest Russian governmental media company so they have enough human resources to find and publish more information. Another possible explanation is that Russian state media finds it important to talk about this topic so they cover everything what goes around Brexit. From Figure 1 it is also seen that state media sources are more active publishers than non-mainstream media both in Russia and Estonia. Novaya Gazeta has the least number of articles about Brexit from all the researched sources. Many articles containing word “brexit” were not even discussing Brexit but Brexit was just mentioned once in another context. For that reason author chose only the most informative articles from Novaya Gazeta and that is why there are only seven articles which were chosen for the research. Despite that fact, articles published in NG are long, informative and written professionally. Interesting point is that Estonian state media sources published almost exactly two times more articles in Estonian language than they did in their Russian part. It makes sense because there are more Estonian readers than Russian readers and number of staff working on Russian part can be smaller which makes it hard to be as active as their Estonian colleagues. Non-mainstream media sources both in Russia and Estonia are not publishing many articles which cover Brexit topic. This can be caused by opposite reasons – lack of funding and giving secondary relevance to the topic of Brexit. Alternative media in this research belongs to either opposition parties or have general anti-governmental approach. This can be the reason why Brexit is the secondary relevance for those sources, as it does not directly touch the situation in Russia or Estonia.



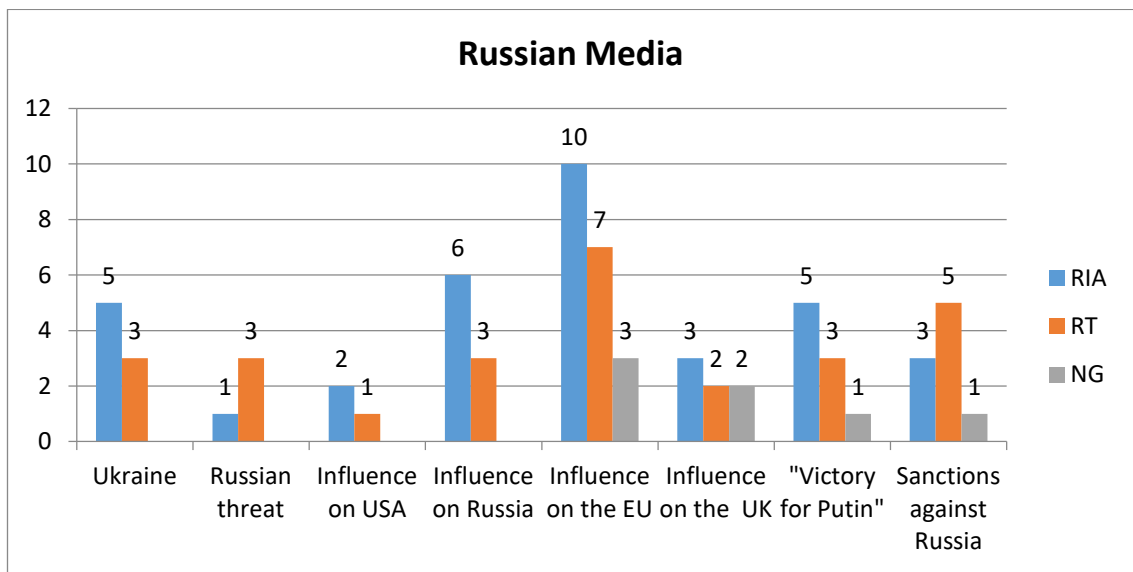
**Figure 2.** Number of articles with keyword „Brexit“ in the period 23.03-23.09.2016

Source: Author's research

Second figure shows how many articles containing keyword “brexit” were published in three different periods: 1) before referendum (23.03-2016-23.06.2016) 2) on the day of results of referendum (24<sup>th</sup> June) 3) after referendum until 23<sup>rd</sup> September 2016.

Some interesting information can be found in this figure. First of all there is general trend that most of the articles were published after referendum, however, it doesn't apply only to Novaya Gazeta. NG published more articles before the referendum than after. In some cases, for example with Ria Novosti, Russia Today, Rus.Postimees, Rus.ERR and Baltnews more articles were published just on 24<sup>th</sup> June than during three months before referendum. The most active publisher is Ria Novosti which posted 433 articles containing word “Brexit” during one day following the referendum. Russia Today has posted four times more articles on 24<sup>th</sup> of June than during three months prior the referendum. However, if we take a look on the number of articles published in all media in Estonia then we notice that it was not very active. The reason for this phenomenon is that 23<sup>rd</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> June are festive days in Estonia. In this Figure it is easy to notice that Russian language media in Estonia posted from two to five times less articles during the entire researched period.

In order to see the difference in narrative, author identified the most popular side topics which were covered or mentioned in the articles along with Brexit. Side topics are important because this way we identify what different media is more interested in. Most of the side topics were discussed in the way how Brexit will influence it. Side topic about Ukraine was discussed in a sense whether Ukraine will be accepted in the EU or how will Brexit influence Ukraine itself. Russian threat was seen as a hypothetical post-Brexit scenario, that Russia may be dangerous for the further existence of the EU. Many have also discussed what influence Brexit would have on the EU, UK, USA and Russia. Some Western politicians like David Cameron or Michael McFaul have said that Brexit is a victory for Vladimir Putin and some articles discussed whether it really is a Putin's victory or not. Some articles have also covered topic of western sanctions against Russia – will they be cancelled or not, should they be expanded or not. The overview of covered side topics begins with Russian media.



**Figure 3.** Side topics covered in researched articles. Source: Author’s research

As we can see the most important and most popular side topic in Russian media was the influence of Brexit on the EU. This can be related to the fact that the European Union is one of Russia’s biggest markets and Russia is interested in strong and stable Europe, even though many say Russia wants the EU to collapse. Another reason why media was interested in the influence of the EU is that Brexit is all about “divorce” of the UK and EU. The European Union becomes smaller for the first time in its history and a lot of attention is paid on that issue. Sanctions against Russia are also important

for Russian media because it influences their everyday lives. The closer look on each media source will give more precise information.

The webpage of news agency Ria Novosti has a possibility to see how many people opened the article. In order to take most relevant articles, the author uses this function to identify the most popular articles which reached the most people. It is also reasonable that people are reading articles that they are most interested in or which offer important information for them personally and for the society. If we start searching articles in Ria Novosti with a keyword “brexit” and Russian transcription “брексит” then the most popular article with over half-million views is the 24<sup>th</sup> June 2016 morning news that United Kingdom decided to leave the European Union. The article turns out to be weighted and correct. The most interesting part comes after the news of Brexit when the world leaders started commenting Brexit. However, it will be discussed later.

Before the referendum there was a big discussion all around the world about what would happen if Britain decided to leave the EU, what would be the consequences for the EU, for Russia, for the UK etc. In April 2016 Ria Novosti posted an article which discusses the influence of Brexit on Russia. The article was written by politologist Andrei Sushencov and he claims that at that point of time Russian media was not very interested in Brexit and it was enlightened briefly, although in Britain many argued that Brexit would be a great victory for Russia and Putin personally. (Sushencov, 2016) Andrei also covers the field where Russia may lose more than win economically and in the end he states that to predict political changes is pretty impossible. Ria Novosti in general tends to be a little bit more positive about the influence of Brexit than other media. However, there is no obvious positive opinion and happiness over Brexit. Oppositely, western politicians see positive impact of Brexit on Russia even more than Russia itself. For example former US ambassador in Russia Michael McFaul made a post in his Twitter account right after referendum results came out: “Not always, but tonight is giant victory for Putin's foreign policy objectives. Give him credit.” (McFaul, 2016) In addition to that former Prime Minister of the UK David Cameron in his campaign asked the audience “Who would be happy if we left?” and then he answered: “Putin might be happy. I suspect al-Baghdadi might be happy.” (Cameron, 2016) Ria Novosti provided readers with comments of many influential people in Russia including the President Vladimir Putin, who said that Brexit is the UK's inside topic and Russia

has nothing to do with that. He also added that he doesn't believe that Brexit would make Western partners cancel sanctions against Russia. (Putin, 2016)

Russia Today posted an article where they quoted Chairman of the State Duma Committee on International Affairs Aleksey Pushkov who posted in his Twitter: “В Лондоне зря нагнетают страсти: Россия не выиграет и не проиграет в случае выхода Британии из ЕС. В Москве к этому чисто академич. интерес.” (Pushkov, 2016) (“They should not be instilling fear in London: Russia will not win and will not lose if Britain decides to leave the EU. Russia has just an academic interest“.)

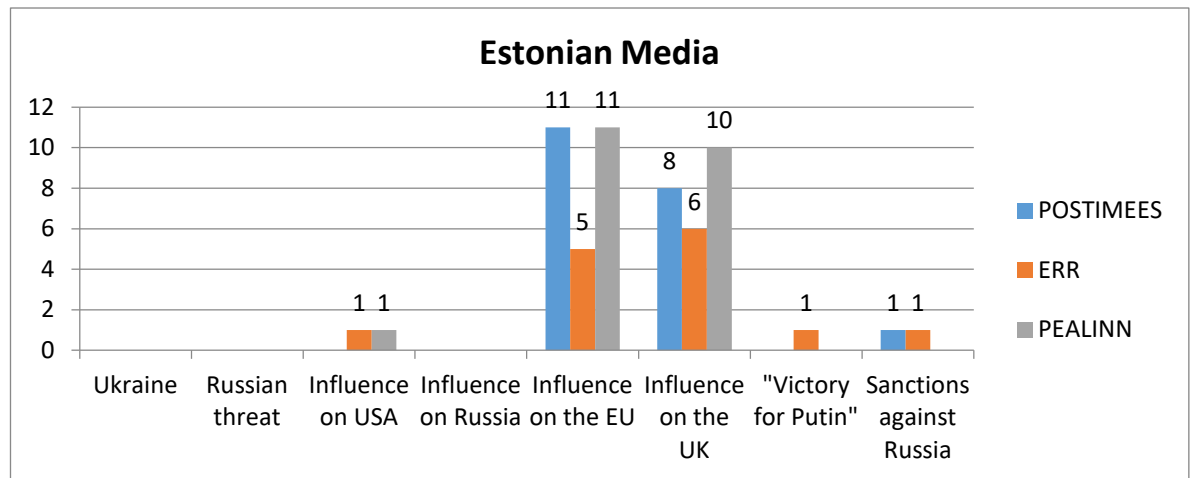
Novaya Gazeta did not post many articles and those that were analyzed covered only most popular side topics such as influence on the EU and the UK. The general trend in NG was that they are optimistic about the influence on the EU and more pessimistic about the influence on the UK which is supported by the quote of Aleksandr Mineev: “Экономически ЕС пострадает от ухода Британии меньше, чем она сама.” (Mineev, 2016) (“Economically the EU will suffer less from Brexit than the UK itself”).

Ria Novosti and Russia Today being state-owned news agencies tend to say that the EU is going to fall and the discuss more about its integration, not economics. For instance, Ria Novosti posted article saying that there is a new petition in Slovakia to hold a referendum to leave the EU (Ria Novosti, 2016) Russia Today quoted Konstantin Koshev who said in his Facebook: “(...) Сторонники "екзитов" поднимут сейчас голову повсеместно, ведь проблема разрыва между амбициями политических лидеров и ожиданиями простых людей во в её без исключения странах ЕС только нарастает. (...)” (Kosachev, 2016) (“[...] The supporters of “exits” will raise their heads everywhere because the problem of the gap between EU leaders’ ambitions and expectations of people will become bigger in all the EU members without any exception. [...]”) In addition to that Maria Zakharova said that the EU’s politics will make other member states hold a similar referendum. (Russia today, 2016)

To sum up the position of Russian media about Brexit based on the analysis of side topics it is easy to notice that Russia is more interested about the influence on the EU, UK and Russia. State-owned media claims that the influence on the EU will be rather negative an alternative media claims that the economic impact will be worse for the UK, not the EU. All the media are interested in the question of sanctions against



Russia and state-owned media speculates about the question of Ukraine's membership in the EU.

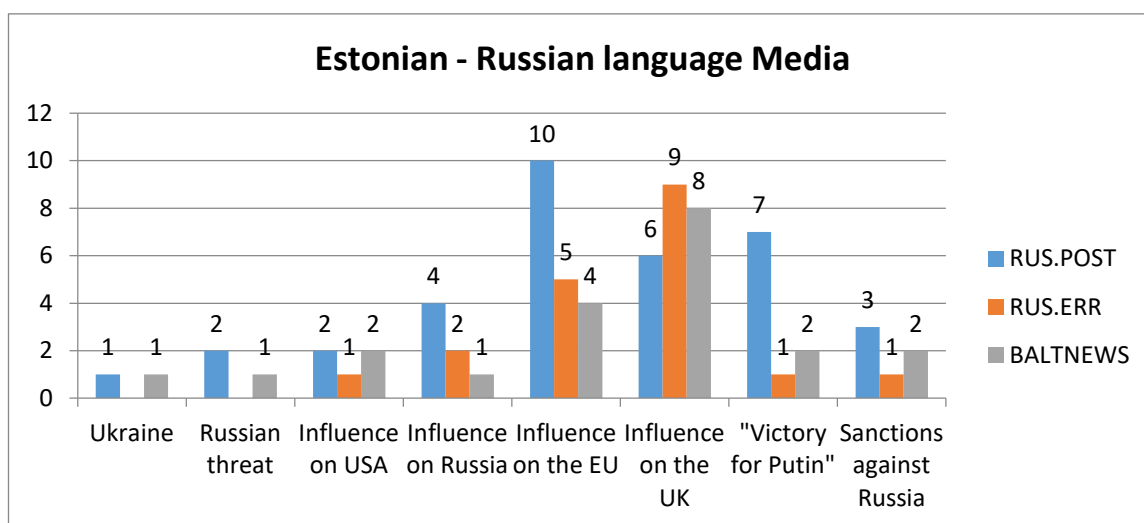


**Figure 4.** Side topics covered in researched articles. Source: Author's research

In Estonian media one can see very different approached in comparison with Russian media. Estonia being a member of the European Union is very interested in the future of the EU. This can be seen in the side topics covered. All the media without exception were discussing what influence Brexit would have on the EU. This discussion was coming along with the discussion of influence on the UK. Estonian medias' view is that impact of Brexit would be more negative for the UK than for the EU. For example in Postimees on the 24th of June politologist Andres Kasekamp expressed his thought: „Pikemas, kahe-kolme aasta perspektiivis on Ühendkuningriigil oodata majandusraskusi“ (Kasekamp, 2016) („In long term perspective, two-three years later United Kingdom will face financial problems“) In addition to that he said: “Eesti poliitika põhineb sellel, et EL peab olema tugev ja ühtne. (...)” (Kasekamp, 2016) (“Estonian politics is based on strong and united EU”) When Russian state media speculated that the European Union may collapse and that more new referendums may happen, Estonian Postimees posted articles claiming that after Brexit there has been raise of support to the EU in six EU member states where research was held. “Prantsusmaal oli toetus Euroopa Liidule kasvanud 2014. aastaga võrreldes 19 protsenti 67 protsendile, Saksamaal 18 protsenti 81 protsendile, Itaalias neli protsenti 59 protsendile, Hispaanias üheksa protsenti 81 protsendile ja Belgias 10 protsenti 75 protsendile.” (Postimees, 2016) (“In France the support to the EU in comparison with the year 2014 increased by 19% to 67%, in Germany by 18% to 81%, in Italy by 4% to

59%, in Spain by 9% to 81% and in Belgium by 10% to 75% of respondents.) ERR posted an article which discussed the quote of the President of the European Commission Jean-Claude Juncker who claimed that the European Union is not in danger despite Brexit. (Juncker, 2016) Alternative Estonian media Pealinn has also written articles that support the European Union and integration. Pealinn is quoting European Commissioner for European Neighbourhood Policy & Enlargement Negotiations Mr. Johannes Hahn: “Suurbritannia otsus Euroopa Liidust lahkuda ei tähenda ühenduse laienemise lõppu.” (Hahn, 2016) (“UK’s decision to leave the EU does not mean the end of EUs’ enlargement”)

Estonian media’s position in the question of Brexit is clear – none of three researched media outlets supports Brexit. The most discussed side topic in Estonian media was the influence of Brexit on the European Union. All three sources have positive view about the future of the EU after Britain leaves it but they also discuss that United Kingdom would lose more than the EU. Local media is more interested in the impact of Brexit on Estonian economy. For example in one of ERR’s articles Swedbank economist Tõnu Mertsina said: “Samuti ei tohiks Brexiti meie väliskaubandusele tervikuna väga olulist otsest mõju Eestile olla.”(...) (Mertsina, 2016) (“Brexit should not directly influence our foreign trade”) Russian media was more interested in the influence on Russia and about the question of sanctions. Estonian media touched this question just a few times.

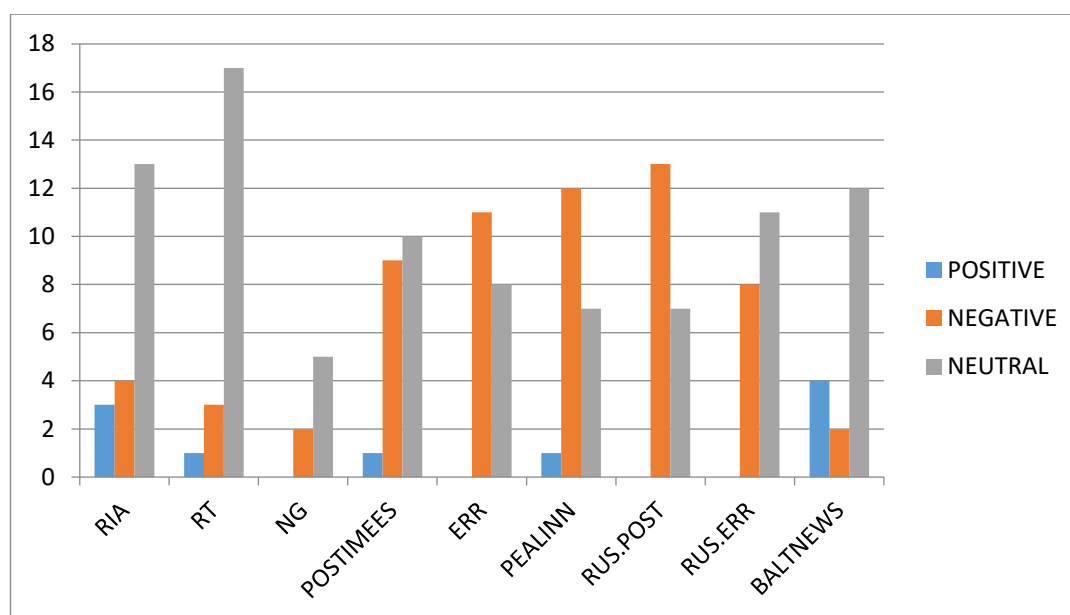


**Figure 5.** Side topics covered in researched articles. Source: Author’s research

Estonian Russian language media is the focus group of this research. In this group we see different picture from Estonian media. However, results differ in comparison with both Russian and Estonian media. Russian language media in Estonia has covered more side topics than Estonian language media. There is also a difference between Russian and Estonian editions of Postimees and ERR which can be seen in Figure 5. Russian Postimees has touched all discussed side topics at least for once while Estonian Postimees touched only three. Russian and Estonian editions have a different editorial board - that is one of the reasons why they have different working style and articles choice. The reason of such a difference is hidden in the fact that Russian Postimees copies articles from Russian news agencies such as Interfax, Ria Novosti, TASS and other. Some articles in Russian Postimees are translated from Estonian and they have the same position but the difference between two editions exists because of articles which are not posted in Estonian edition but posted in Russian. In general Russian Postimees pays more attention on the influence on Russia, sanctions against Russia and looks more like Russian media outlets. For example one article in Postimees covered the question of sanctions, saying that British Foreign minister Phillip Hammond was afraid that the EU may weaken or cancel sanctions against Russia: "Я опасаюсь, что, теперь, когда Британия будет иметь намного более слабый голос в этом вопросе, это выльется в то, что наши европейские партнеры начнут колебаться" (Hammond, 2016) ("I am afraid, that now, when the UK will have a weaker voice in this question, it will turn out that our European partners would start hesitating"). Russian Postimees also like quoting Russian politicians, for example Deputy Prime Minister of Russia Arkadiy Dvorkovich who said: „Для России важно, чтобы Европа была сильной. Нам не нужны слабые партнеры, нам нужны сильные партнеры, чтобы двигаться вперед. Решение Великобритании сделало Европу слабее”. (Dvorkovich, 2016) ("For Russia it is important that Europe stays strong. We do not need weak partners; we need strong partners in order to keep going. The UK's decision made Europe weaker"). The similarity with Estonian edition stands in the fact that Russian Postimees does not cover Brexit as a positive event.

Russian ERR is a state owned broadcasting company and it is limited in its work by the same law as Estonian ERR – Eesti Rahvusringhääkingu Seadus. ERR articles have discussed influence on the UK the most and according to their articles UK's future is far from being perfect. One of the articles predicted the reduction of tourists flow to

the UK and reduction of the country's GDP: “Эксперты прогнозируют снижение ВВП страны на 2% в течение следующих лет. По различным оценкам, этот показатель не сможет вернуться на прежние показатели до 2023 года.” (ERR, 2016) (“Experts predict the reduction of UK's GDP by 2% in the next few years. According to different data, this index may not restore until 2023.”) ERR has also posted articles which say that Brexit is good for Russia and quoted, for example, director of the Center of Political Information Mr. Aleksey Muhin: “(...) в какой-то степени та турбулентность, которую испытывает Евросоюз, России выгодна. Потому что она прекрасно показывает необходимость России как регулятора на континенте и подчеркивает это раз за разом.” (Muhin, 2016) (“For some extent this turbulence that the EU feels is an advantage to Russia. This shows well that Russia is needed on the continent as a regulator”)



**Figure 6.** Number of articles positioning Brexit as positive, negative or neutral connotation. Source: Author's research

In order to summarize the narrative used in different media outlets author gives an overview of positions of analyzed articles. The figure 6 shows how many articles positioned Brexit positively, negatively or neutrally. Positive positioning means that article supported Brexit and said that it would have positive effect on politics, economics etc. Negative positioning means that article did not support Brexit and discussed negative outcomes of that event. Neutral articles are the articles which did not provide reader with opinion about Brexit. Those are the articles which informed about new events, facts and did not discuss economic, political, cultural or any other impact of

Brexit. In addition those are also the articles that represent a fair balance of positive and negative connotations were recorded as neutral.

Figure 6 shows that the majority of articles posted in Estonian media have negative discourse about Brexit. Russian media has more neutral tone of articles, however, the number of negative positioning is very low. Russian state-owned media has more Brexit supportive narrative than alternative Russian media.

Russian language media in Estonia has within-group difference. If Pealinn, being an alternative source in Estonian media, positioned Brexit as a negative event, then Baltnews has the record number of articles which support Brexit. Baltnews has more Brexit-supportive articles than Ria Novosti.

	Positive %	Negative %	Neutral %
RIA	15	20	<b>65</b>
RT	4,76	14,28	<b>80,95</b>
NG	0	28,57	<b>71,43</b>
POSTIMEES	5	45	<b>50</b>
ERR	0	<b>57,89</b>	42,10
PEALINN	5	<b>60</b>	35
RUS.POST	0	<b>65</b>	35
RUS.ERR	0	42,10	<b>57,89</b>
BALTNEWS	22,2	11,1	<b>66,6</b>

**Table 1.** Percentage of researched articles that are positioning Brexit as positive, negative or neutral event. Source: Author's research

The Table 1 shows the percentage of researched articles that are positioning Brexit as positive, negative or neutral event. From the Figure 6 and Table 1 it is seen that the majority of media outlets cover Brexit rather neutrally but two Estonian and one Estonian-Russian language sources cover it more negatively. None of sources had overwhelming positive position.

Pealinn has issued one article which covers Brexit as rather positive event. However, this article is based on the comment given by Heinar – ordinary Estonian citizen questioned on the street by reporters of Pealinn. Heinar said: "Kas ta on hea või halb, see on huvitav küsimus. Hea on ta selles mõttes, et võib-olla hakatakse mõtlema ja

piirama igasugust sisserännet, mis võivad laostada selle Euroopa Liidu nii või naa." (Heinar, 2016) ("Is it good or bad - it is an interesting question. It is good in a sense that now they will start to think and limit immigration that can disintegrate the EU one way or another") Heinar touched one of the reasons which made British people vote for "Leave" – immigration. He speaks about Brexit as it is a refreshing event for the EU and its politicians who may now start to think if what has been done wrong and what should be changed. As the mass immigration was one of the main reasons of Brexit, Heinar hopes that now the European Union will change its immigration policy.

The most interesting results can be found in Baltnews. First of all, Baltnews is an alternative Russian-language Estonian media outlet and it has the biggest number of articles supporting Brexit. 22% of researched articles have covered Brexit positively. This is a surprising discovery because even Russian state media Ria Novosti has 15% of positive coverage. However, despite the fact that Baltnews is more optimistic about Brexit than others, articles published in Baltnews cannot be called "trustworthy". One of the articles covering Brexit positively has a title "Бизнес-леди из Лондона: какая Европа? Мы все однозначно за Brexit!" (Business woman from London: "What Europe! Of course we support Brexit!") and it begins with the following sentence: "BaltNews.ee попросил одну из представителей бизнес-класса Англии, живую там более 25 лет и оказывающую консалтинговые услуги предпринимателям, поделиться своим мнением о предстоящем референдуме." (Baltnews, 2016) (Baltnews.ee asked one representative of English business-class, who lives there for over 25 years and who gives consultations to businessmen, what she thinks about the upcoming referendum). There is no more explanation who that businesswoman was and why she is reliable source of information. Later on the referendum 60% of Londoners will vote in favour of remaining in the European Union. (BBC, 2016) Many other articles in Baltnews are based on people's posts in Facebook. For example on the day after referendum, Baltnews posted an article where they put selection of some well known Russian-speaker's Facebook comments about Brexit and most of these comments were with positive or neutral positioning of Brexit.

## Conclusion

United Kingdom has decided to leave the European Union and this is the decision made by the British people through democratic referendum. In theoretical part the main reasons that led the people to make this decision were discussed and showed that euroscepticism is not a new phenomenon for the United Kingdom. Euroscepticism has been a constant phenomenon of British membership in the EU. In 2016 due to internal political reasons the British government decided to call a referendum.

In the empirical part different narratives on Brexit were discussed. The aim of this thesis was to find out whether Estonian Russian language media are reflecting more narrative of Russian Federation or Estonian narrative of the discourse on Brexit and also find out how different media spheres influence the way Brexit is presented in media.

On the basis of results emerged from the comparative analysis of articles, the following conclusions can be made:

- 1) In Estonia state-owned Russian language media outlets and the ones close to the governmental circles are reflecting more similar position to the Estonian-language media. However, results are rather ambiguous. In general Russian-language media in Estonia are reflecting more Estonian language media position and in addition to that some of Russian media narrative, which does not appear in Estonian media, can be found in Russian language editions. This includes discussions about the question of sanctions against Russia, influence of Brexit on Russia, speculations whether Brexit is Vladimir Putin's victory or not.
- 2) Non-mainstream Russian-language media in Estonia is even more radical and Brexit-supportive than Russian state-owned media. It has published more articles that positively connote Brexit than any other media outlet used for the research. These types of media outlets are more affected by the Russian media narrative and tend to be more critical to the European Union and more supportive to Russia.

There are within-group differences in Russian media and Russian-language media in Estonia. The difference emerge in the position taken by state-owned and non-mainstream media sources. The cross-group similarities are found between Estonian and Estonian-Russian state media outlets which follow the line of covering Brexit negatively.

The comparative analysis of media outlets helped to find out how Russian language media in Estonia is affected and why. It has also revealed that there is a big difference in narrative depending on the background of the outlets. Consequently, the analysis proved fruitful. Estonian Russian-language mainstream media is not fully affected by the Russian narrative and it still mostly reflects the position presented in Estonian-language media. In this sense Estonian Russian speaking minority can be influenced by two different narratives depending on what media they decide to follow. Russian media in general present a more complete coverage and this might be a reason for readers choose to follow them. There are reasons to believe that the way Russia is framed by Estonian-Russian media plays a role in this choice. In addition Estonian media might be interested to improve the coverage provided by the Russian language state-media because nowadays it is posting twice less articles than Estonian media and few times less than Russian media. Doubts arise concerning the reliability of non-mainstream media as they can be based on not trustful sources and present information in a distorted way. However, they can give another point of view on the topic discussed. Generally there was no change in narrative during three months after the referendum because for the first months it was still uncertain what is actually going to happen and how it will influence the economy and politics. Russian and alternative Russian-language media in Estonia are more eurosceptical so they often reflect in their articles the reasons for leaving the EU, which were discussed in the theoretical part.

Further research seems needed on the influence of alternative media on public opinion and its importance for the readers. Another possible way of developing this research is analyzing whether there is a general difference in narratives in three researched groups, not only on the discourse of Brexit.



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# **BREXITI DISKURSUSE VÕRDLEV ANALÜÜS EESTI- JA VENEKEELSE MEEDIA KONTEKSTIS**

Artur Panov

## **Resümee**

Brexiti referendumi näol oli tegemist sündmusega, mis toimus 2016. aastal ja mis võib lähi- ja kaugtulevikus mõjutada maailma majandust, poliitikat ja julgeolekut. Suurbritannia otsus Euroopa liidust lahkuda on pretsedenditu ning seetõttu on see saanud kõikjal suurt meedia tähelepanu. Brexit võib mõjutada maailma riike nii positiivselt kui ka negatiivselt. Täna ses poliitilises olukorras räägitakse Lääne riikides, et Brexit on kasulik Venemaale ning Vladimir Putini jaoks see oli suur võit.

Selle töö eesmärgiks on välja selgitada, kas Eesti venekeelne meedia peegeldab rohkem Venemaa või Eesti positsiooni Brexiti küsimuses ning aru saada kuidas erinev keskkond mõjutab Brexiti kajastust meedias. See teema on aktuaalne seetõttu, et Eesti ühiskond on avatud ja võib olla mõjutatud nii Vene kui ka Eesti narratiivist ning mõjutamise tulemus võib olla seotud inimese rahvusega. Meedia analüüs on üles ehitatud Brexiti teemal sellepärast, et see sündmus on päevakajaline, oluline nii Euroopa Liidu kui ka Eesti Vabariigi jaoks ning Brexiti räägitakse Eestis ja Venemaal erinevalt.

Analüüsitakse kolme erinevat gruppi – Vene, Eesti ja Eesti venekeelne meedia. Igas grupis analüüsitakse kolme meediaallikat, millest kaks on kas riiklikus omanduses olevad väljaanded või riikliku positsiooni toetavad väljaanded ja üks on alternatiivne ehk riigiga mitteseotud meedia allikas. Töös võrreldakse nendes allikates ilmunud artikleid, mis käsitlevad Brexiti teemat perioodil 23. märts kuni 23. september 2016. Artikleid analüüsitakse sisuliselt ning uuritakse, kas artikkel on Brexiti suhtes positiivne, negatiivne või neutraalne. Saadud andmete põhjal võrreldakse Eesti venekeelset meediat Eesti ja Vene meediaga ning seejärel tehakse selgeks, mis narratiivile on Eesti venekeelne meedia lähedasem. Võrdleva analüüsi käigus saadud tulemus on mitmetähenduslik, kuna selgus, et venekeelne meedia Eestis on rohkem mõjutatud eestikeelse meedia poolt, kuid esinevad ka Vene meediale omased tunnused. Selgus ka, et narratiiv sõltub ka sellest, kas meediaallikas on riiklik või alternatiivne. Eesti alternatiivne venekeelne meedia on Brexiti suhtes rohkem positiivne ning peegeldab rohkem Vene meedia positsiooni.

Seda teemat on võimalik arendada ja edasi uurida. Näiteks üheks võimaluseks võib olla mahukam Eesti, Vene ja Eesti venekeelse meedia võrdlev analüüs, milles uuritakse kuidas on Eesti venekeelne meedia mõjutatud üldisemalt, mitte ainult Brexiti teema raames. Teiseks võimaluseks on alternatiivsete allikate uurimine, kuidas nad mõjutavad ühiskonna maailmavaadet ja kas need allikad on inimeste jaoks olulised ja usaldusväärsed.

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